

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF MAY 18, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Bolton: Rebecca Bucciaglia; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

NRWA: Jennifer Keegan and Al Futterman

NPS: Emma Lord

MF&W: Pat Huckery

DEC: Neil Angus

Guests: Leslie Gabriliska, MF&W; Hannah Volk, NPS Fellow

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. Due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic the meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

Administrative

The minutes of the April 20, 2023 meeting were approved as presented.

NPS Update

Emma Lord announced the upcoming Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers virtual speaker series event on May 24th, noon – 1:30 PM. The meeting will feature two speakers discussing community engagement. If Council members have not received a Zoom invitation they should contact Emma for one.

Lucy asked about the status of our FY 24 Budget and Work Plan. Emma reported it is continuing through internal review but has no reason to believe that it will not be approved before July 1st.

Finances

Jennifer Keegan provided an update on the Council's finances, noting expenditures are on track. The account balance as of the end of April is approximately \$146,000. As there are several projects that may still be funded (and therefore obligate FY23 funds) before the end of the fiscal year, we should be within the NPS preferred roll-over of less than 20% of federal funds. Lucy reminded the Council that we must spend all funds by the end of the Cooperative Agreement which extends through FY25.

Update on Projects

Squannacook River Regional Conservation Workshop: Lucy reviewed the Consultant Agreement with Robb Johnson Associates, focusing on Attachment A, Scope of Services. The proposed date for workshop is either July 14th or July 21st, 9 AM – 1 PM at the NRWA's River Resource Center. It was agreed that Robb should attend a Council meeting after the workshop to share his insights and recommendations for additional workshops. On motion made and seconded, the Chair was authorized to sign the Consultant Agreement. The budget for the workshop is estimated to be between \$15,000 and \$20,000. Neil Angus offered to help Al Futterman with the in-house production of large-format maps.

Interpretive Signage Project: Emma screen-shared a mock-up of the draft signage, noting the kiosk dimensions to be 24” high by 36” wide. The signs are to be somewhat generic and uniform regarding Wild & Scenic Rivers, with the addition of some site-specific information. The proposal was to use illustrations of wildlife, fish, and plants as opposed to photographs. However, the fish shown for the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers should be cold-water, such as trout, while that for the Nashua should be warm-water, such as bass. Each sign will include a map of the river, with an inset of all three rivers. There was a question of whether the illustration should cover the entire sign, being background to text, or only partially cover the sign as a stand-alone feature. Emma noted the cost of a full illustration was approximately \$6,500. Joan Wotkowicz suggested that text should be limited to 150 words as signs are read very quickly and longer text could be ignored. The locations for these initial signs are the accessible fishing pier on the Nissitissit River in Brookline, Petapawag on the Nashua River in Groton, and Adams Dam on the Squannacook River in Townsend. The landowners have been contacted and have initially agreed to the signs on their property, but they will need to provide formal approval when the signage is finalized. Emma reported that once the sign design and content has been finalized, sign production by Pannier will take approximately two to three weeks. The intent is to install the signs by the end of this summer.

River Canoe Access & Recreation Charrette: Emma reported on the status of this project which is being held in partnership with the River Management Society. Planned for a 2 ½ day event, it will be held September 6th – 8th at the River Resource Center and will include both field time and class time for participants to develop proposals for improved canoe access to the river. Al has contacted landowners for permission to use two potential sites: the Beaver Brook Association land in Hollis adjacent to W. Hollis and Worcester Roads, which has serious erosion issues, and Petapawag in Groton, as well as the state-owned canoe launch site across from Petapawag on Rts 111/119, which are popular and heavily used sites. Hannah Volk added that they hope to have more data on the level of use so that can be considered in developing proposals for these sites.

Dragonfly Mercury Project: Emma reported that sampling will be taking place in July, August or September, dates to be determined. There will be one sampling site on each of the rivers, as was done last year. The samples may also be analyzed for PFAS, and, as last year’s samples are also still viable, they could be similarly tested. Fun fact: dragonfly larval stage lasts for up to five years!

Potential Projects

Wild Inside: Stacey Chilcoat presented a proposal for consideration based on an extremely successful NRWA program: Wild Inside. Started last year with funding from a North Central Massachusetts Community Foundation grant, the NRWA has offered this program at various Council on Aging (COA) facilities in our area, delving into the various critters dependent on our Wild and Scenic Rivers and surrounding habitat. The genesis for this program was to take our “wild” world to those who could not readily get out and experience it. The program has been very well received and there have been numerous requests for it to be given elsewhere. The proponents were requesting \$4,900 for a series of free programs. Pat Huckery asked if MassWildlife’s “iNaturalist” interactive site (developed through its “All Wildlife Biodiversity” project) could be incorporated into the Wild Inside program, or at least introduced as another resource for participants to explore. Rebecca Bucciaglia asked if other partners should be invited to participate in this series. On motion made and seconded, it was unanimously approved to fund this proposal at \$4,900.

Mass Rivers Alliance/Mass Audubon Climate Curriculum: Lucy raised this eight-module curriculum, “Building Community Resilience,” as a possible series we might want to offer our river towns. The program focuses on bylaws and regulations town boards could adopt to help mitigate climate impacts to

developments and infrastructure. It was agreed that this might be better suited for the Conservation Networking program, especially if expanded to include members of planning boards or local planners and DPW superintendents. Paula Terrasi noted that new FEMA flood maps for this area would be forthcoming. In addition, the MS4 permits will soon require the use of green infrastructure for new or upgraded stormwater systems.

Other

Ayer/Devens 2022 Community Grant: Lucy explained that the Devens Enterprise Commission would like to amend the budget for this grant and asked Neil to describe the need. Neil reported that the trail has been laid out and, due to a different configuration, did not require the number of directional signs originally proposed. In addition, the reconfiguration of the site has made it possible to consider the inclusion of a wildflower meadow. Therefore, given there remains \$1,851 in unspent funds, the proponents would like to redirect them to the materials needed to create a wildflower meadow. The Ayer DPW will supply the labor for this job. On motion made and seconded, the requested amendment to the budget was unanimously approved.

2023 Land Protection Grants: Lucy reported she had had a couple of inquiries about this program, specifically asking if development of an invasive species management plan for conserved lands would be appropriate for funding. Michele Girard noted that conservation lands need a baseline survey to assure proper long-term management and that these surveys are often not done due to the cost. Lucy asked if we should amend the scope of this program to allow these types of expenses. Another option, however, would be to expand the level of funding in the 2024 Community Grants program to cover management plans and baseline surveys. Given the lack of applications, it was agreed to extend the period for submittal to June 14th. Al will post a notice on the Council's website and Lucy will ask Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold to do the same on the NRWA website. Council members were encouraged to reach out again to local conservation groups and town officials.

Conservation Networking: Al reported that a recent webinar offered jointly by the Council and the NRWA Climate Impact Committee on BioMap 3, "The Future of Conservation," was well received. The new map has been designed to be readily updated to keep it current as our changing climate impacts critical habitats.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, June 15, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom